DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 029 393 EA 002 264

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The Dilemma of the School Superintendent.

Pub Date 13 Apr 69

Note-10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Sch. Boards Assn. (29th, Miami Beach, Florida, April 13, 1969)

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.60

Descriptors-*Administrative Change, Administrator Guides, Administrator Role, Educational Innovation, Educational Needs, *Educational Objectives, Educational Problems, Political Power, Public Support, *School Superintendents, *Social Change, *Superintendent Role

School superintendents constrained by an administrative ideology that is obsolete face a dilemma in responding to the social and cultural changes currently taking place in American society. For the emergent role of the school superintendent to be consonant with societal change, four propositions are suggested: (1) Greater power and influence should be added to both the administrative and leadership dimensions of his role. (2) his values and behavior should become increasingly democratic. (3) his role should become more political in character, and (4) his efforts should be increasingly directed towards the fostering and advocating of innovation. (JH)

ED029393

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Archie R. Dykes

THE DILEMMA OF THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

Address for Special Interest Clinic
Nat'l School Boards Assoc. Conven.
Miami Beach - April 13
1969

What is the dilemma of the school superintendent? I suggest it is the dilemma of being able to meet the great new problems which now confront education while being hampered and constrained by an administrative ideology that is obsolete and out of date. Another way of stating the dilemma would be to say that our traditional views and attitudes about administration and administrative behavior are out of step and in some cases antithetical to the leadership demands now being placed on the school administrator.

What has brought the dilemma into such sharp focus? The answer, of course, lies in the great changes going on about us and the resultant tension and unsettledness of the American society. To make this point, there is no need to recite at length or catalogue in detail the great changes going on about us. Everyone of you in this audience, indeed anyone remotely cognizant of the events around him, recognizes that we live in a time of unparalleled change. And no one would question, I believe, that these great changes have enormous implications for all of us, in our citizenship responsibilities, in our family obligations, but especially in our duties as administrators and educational leaders.

These circumstances have profound implications for today's school superintendent. New demands and new needs which grow out of change force a continuous reassessment of our traditional understandings and perceptions

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about administration, its functions, its modes of operation, and the objectives it seeks to achieve. If we are to avoid the impossible situation of trying to apply our traditional concepts and understandings to circumstances which they no longer fit, we must undertake to shape, to consciously design, the emergent role of administrators. Using all the intelligence, the insights, and the understandings which can be brought to bear, we must seek the planned evolvement of educational administration in pace with larger social and cultural changes. Our failure to do so can only mean decreasing relevance of the administrator to educational problems and issues central to our times. One of the continuing tasks before us, therefore, is that of anticipating and implementing necessary changes in administration before the circumstances which require the changes are fully upon us.

Ascendant social and cultural forces point to emerging alterations in the role of the superintendent and suggest what directional influences may be needed. The systematic and appropriate application of our knowledge and understandings in identifying these forces, extrapolating their implications for educational administration, and subsequently adjusting and adapting the emergent role of the administrator is essential. The propositions which follow, descriptive of the emergent role of the administrator, are based on the assumption that we shall plan and achieve an administrative role consonant with the emergent social and cultural characteristics of our time.[1]

Proposition No. 1. The superintendent should become stronger, more powerful, and more influential in both the administrative and leadership dimensions of his role.

The major purpose of school administration is to provide the coordination and the leadership necessary for the achievement of the goals for which the

school system exists.[2] The efficacy and relevance of administration, therefore, may be measured by its ability to act quickly and decisively when action is necessary to achieve desired goals. This is especially true in a time of rapid social and cultural change such as we are now experiencing.

Increasingly, the growth and complexity of Twentieth Century America requires ever more powerful and more directive administration. In the context of such a cultural milieu, students of government and administration have expressed concern regarding our governmental structure and administrative functioning. Woodrow Wilson, writing near the turn of the century, noted that "the English race...has long and successfully studied the art of curbing executive power to the constant neglect of the art of perfecting executive methods. It has exercised itself much more in controlling than in energizing government." He went on to say, "There is no danger in power, if only it be not irresponsible."[3]

Paul H. Appleby, in his influential monograph, Policy and Administration, pointed out that overemphasis on checks and balances in government has made the effective exercise of power "so dependent upon delicate interaction between its parts, as to induce very serious and chronic frustration among its officials."[4]

Many writers have commented on the "man in the middle" concept of today's school superintendent. Exposed and extremely vulnerable, he faces toward several different audiences, each with its own, and frequently conflicting, set of expectations. Rendered impotent to act decisively by the conflicting expectations, his job becomes what Spindler called a balancing role.

> "His job is in large part that of maintaining a working equilibrium of at best antagonistically cooperative forces.

This is one of the reasons why school administrators are rarely outspoken protagonists of a consistent and vigorously profiled point of view."[5]

This lack of relevant administrative power creates circumstances not unlike those characterized by F. M. Cornford's commentary on the conditions at Cambridge University in the early years of the present century. "Nothing is ever done until everyone is convinced that it ought to be done, and has been convinced for so long that it is now time to do something else."[6]

Administrative power is essential if organizations are to achieve the purposes for which they exist. This is doubly true in a time of rapid change when the ability to act quickly and decisively is critical. Education today is conducted in a milieu of powerful and conflicting forces. Without sufficient administrative power, the superintendent cannot maintain his relevance to such forces and his leadership is neutralized. Thus the schools drift aimlessly in the maelstrom of forces, needed action is not taken, and educational problems go untreated and unresolved.

Proposition No. 2. Administrative values and behavior manifested by the school superintendent should become increasingly democratic.

In the minds of many, increased administrative power is incompatible with democracy. This is a misconception derived from the conventional wisdom of our culture. The central issue is not whether responsibility, both legal and moral, to the public will is effectively imposed upon the administrator. And this latter problem has little to do with the issue of administrative power.

It is generally recognized today that the democratic idea is one of the major forces impelling mankind. Whether manifested in the desire of former colonial peoples for independence or in the militancy of teachers in the United States, the impelling force is the same. In noting the great impact of the democratic idea on Western culture, A. N. Whitehead once observed that governments generally have shifted from belief in the efficacy of coercion as a principle of management to belief that persuasion is a superior technique. Thus, a fundamental cultural assumption has changed from an authoritarian character to a democratic one.

Such a pervasive cultural change has profound implications for the superintendent's role. Expectations and attitudes of people within and without the educational enterprise are changing in a particular direction, and administrative behavior must change in the same direction and at the same or greater rate. Failure of administrators to recognize this great shift in a foundational cultural assumption, occurring so gradually that it must be observed in time, and to perceive its implications for their behavior can only mean they will be swept aside by the force of the movement. In a society increasingly actuated by democracy, the viability of administration is dependent upon the full incorporation of democratic precepts and practices in the administrative processes.

Proposition No. 3. The superintendent's role should become more political in character.

Orthodox theories of administration have long held that politics and administration are separate realities, each existing in a self-contained world of its own, with its own separate values, objectives, rules, and methods. Assumed as a self-evident truth and a desirable goal, the

politics-administration dichotomy dominated political science and public administration during the first four decades of this century. The dichotomy was given birth by Professor Frank J. Goodnow, an early scholar in the field of public administration, who argued that all governmental functions consist of two basic elements, politics and administration. Implicit in Goodnow's position was the assumption that administration should be exclusively concerned with the implementation of decisions reached in the realm of politics as contrasted with involvement in the decision-making processes.

While there has always been some skepticism as to the validity of this orthodox view of politics and administration, the evolution of political theory places the concept under increasing attack. Basic changes occurring in our culture are increasingly spotlighting administration as one of the major political processes. The amassing of sufficient power to achieve objectives, the exercise of discretionary authority, the making of value choices, and the deep involvement in shaping policy are characteristic and increasing functions of administrators; they are thus importantly engaged in politics.

Among the major responsibilities reposing on the school superintendent today are those of shaping public policy to accommodate the peculiar needs of education and the securing of sufficient public support to bring the policy into reality. The processes involved in achieving both objectives are wholly political in character. In a society increasingly characterized by powerful and competing forces, the marshalling of political power to achieve educational objectives is crucial. Without such power, significant action cannot be taken and education suffers from public indifference and apathy.

Today in our culture, it is exceedingly difficult to accomplish important objectives without widespread public support. Political leadership, in its finest sense, involves the continuous identification and articulation of what it is the public should support and the securing of overt manifestations of that support through confirming public action. It is this function which looms large in the emerging role of the superintendent. Its importance is indicated in the following words.

> The future of public education will not be determined by public need alone. It will be determined by those who can translate public need into public policy--by schoolmen in politics. Since the quality of our society rests in large measure upon the quality of our public education, a widespread recognition that schoolmen must be not only aware of politics, but influential in politics, may be the key to our survival as a free and civilized nation.[7]

Proposition No. 4. The fostering and advocating of innovation should be an increasingly important function of the superintendent.

A number of observers, reflecting on our times, maintain that there is no more appropriate concern for educators than the implementation of planned change in our educational institutions. There is general agreement that planned change is essential if the schools are to achieve their goals and maintain relevance to the larger society which they serve. Further, in the face of increasingly rapid cultural change, it is clear that the pace of change within our educational institutions must quicken. The case is well stated in the following quote:

> In the face of all these changes...the schools' society and culture seem largely undisturbed. Comparing classrooms now

with classrooms of 40 years ago, one notes that at both times there were numbers of students not much interested in what was being done; the typical teacher still presents material and quizzes the kids to see if they understand it; the amount of creativity and excitement is probably no greater now than then. The development of new materials and techniques has enabled us to spin our wheels in one place, to conduct business as usual in the face of dramatic changes in the society and in the clientele of the school. The operation of the educational enterprise has encountered what can only be thought of by the traditional teacher as a very large number of increasingly serious obstacles and the new devices sustain the forlorn hope of protecting and maintaining, rather than changing, the old orthodoxy in the face of the most important revolutions in the history of mankind.[8]

A dominating characteristic of educational institutions, as in other social organizations, is their resistance to change. All organizations possess built-in devices which tend to maintain stability. Acting as a gyroscope, these devices seek to hold the organization in a steady state, or to return it to stability when buffeted from within or without. This tendency toward stability, seemingly inherent in all organizations, constitutes a powerful force against change. Thus, there is a disturbing paucity of change resulting from deliberately designed attempts to alter the schools and their programs in order to make them more efficacious in serving the purposes for which they exist.

It is this problem which looms large in the emergent role of the superintendent. Traditionally, it has been more the role of administration

to support the status quo than to promote change. Now the administrator must become an agent of change. The implications of such a polarized shift in role are profound. Traditional (and previously quite commendable) patterns of behavior, attitudes, values, and organizational structure may no longer be acceptable. In fact, our conventional ideology about such matters produces seriously dysfunctional consequences in regard to the fostering and advocating of innovation in the educational establishment. Quite obviously, then, this function of the emergent administrative role forces a rigorous and candid examination of our conventional perceptions and understandings about administration, its functions and objectives, as well as the general structure of the educational organization.

The dilemma for today's educational administrator, whether he be school superintendent, school principal, university president, or whatever, is that of melding new concepts and administrative ideologies into administrative practice in pace with the great social and cultural changes now sweeping our nation and the world, and do so at a time when administration itself is being subjected to unparalleled stress and strain from both within and without the educational enterprise.

FOOTNOTES

[1]A word of caution is appropriate here. We must avoid attempts to provide a fixed and final administration. Our profession must be viewed in the context of a world moving on a virtually perpendicular curve of scientific discovery, technological innovation, and social and cultural change. In such a milieu, there is increasing finiteness to the period in which the "best knowledge" or "best understandings" as we know them will hold true.

[2]This is not to imply that leadership and administration are synonymous. The assumption is made, however, that effective performance in both administration and leadership functions is essential to goal achievement.

[3]Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," Political Science Quarterly, LVI (December, 1941), pp. 490-97. (Copyright 1887, The Academy of Political Science).

[4]Paul H. Appleby, Policy and Administration (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1949), p. 94.

[5]George Spindler (ed.) Education and Culture: Anthropological Approaches (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1963), p. 142.

[6]F. M. Cornford, Microcosmographia Academica Being a Guide for the Young Academic Politician (Cambridge, Eng.: Dunster House, 1923), p. 32.

[7]Stephen K. Bailey et al., Schoolmen and Politics (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1962), p. 108.

[8]Herbert A. Thelen, "New Practices on the Firing Line," Administrator's Notebook, XII, No. 5 (January, 1964).